

Indiana State Museum

Educational Opportunities for Your Students

Famous Hoosiers

Madam C. J. Walker



Lesson Plan
Text, Activities and Resources
Grades 3-5

Madam C. J. Walker

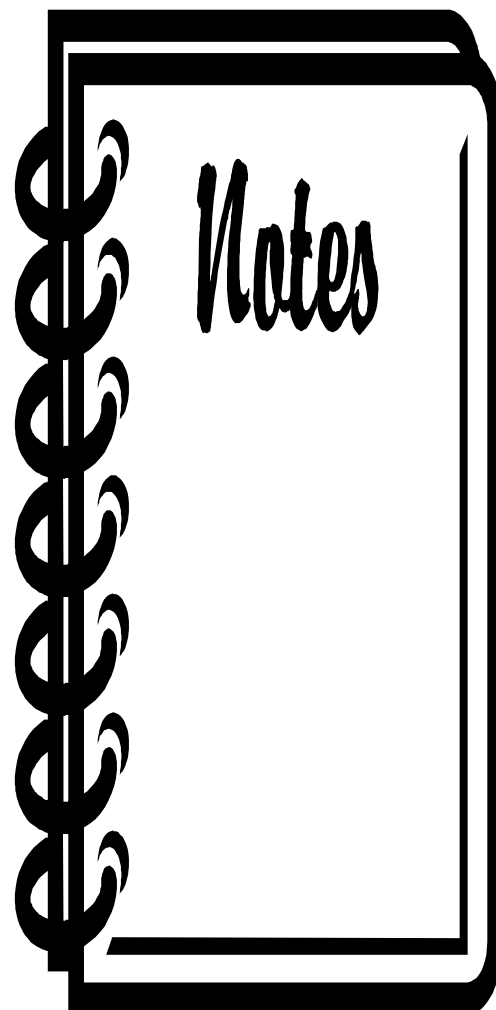
Grades 3-5

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INTRODUCTION

Many fascinating females have made numerous contributions to our country's heritage. Heighten your students' awareness of the important role women have played in Indiana's history. This lesson plan incorporates oral and written language, reading, vocabulary development, social studies and critical thinking. The lessons contained in this packet are intended for grades 3 – 5. The activities are designed to be innovative and to meet Indiana Academic Standards. The text and worksheets are reproducible.



SETTING THE STAGE

To begin the lesson plan, you might want the environment of your entire classroom to reflect women in America's history. This can be achieved by incorporating this theme into bulletin boards, learning centers, art projects and whatever else you are doing in your classroom. When you set the tone of your classroom in this manner, learning becomes an all-encompassing experience for your students. Vocabulary words can become part of your weekly spelling list and stories of famous American women can become enrichment in your reading circles. We encourage you to use this lesson plan as a springboard to further knowledge about famous women of the world. A post-test is included to help you assess what your students know about contributions women have made in America and specifically about Madam Walker. A short list of famous women is included in the resource section.

PRE-TEST ABOUT WOMEN IN HISTORY

NAME _____ DATE _____

Taking this short test will help you think about famous women of America. Do your best and discuss your answers as a class. This test is not for a grade but to find out what you know about women's roles in America and Indiana.

1. Who are some famous women in American History?

2. What role have these women played in our country's history?

3. Do you know who Madam C. J. Walker is? _____

4. Do you know where in Indiana she lived and what important thing she did? _____

5. What do you think makes a woman important today? _____

8. Do you think women of ethnic backgrounds have a harder time making their mark in the world? _____

9. Do you know the name of our First Lady of Indiana? (Pssst: That's the governor's wife!)

10. What would you like to learn about Madam C. J. Walker ? (List 3 things)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Madam C. J. Walker: Entrepreneur



Americans have always professed admiration for individuals who embody the characteristics of thrift, industry, self-reliance and self-determination. Few persons in American history exemplify these qualities more than Madam C. J. Walker, who, in her energy, ambition and tireless work ethic, is a virtual prototype of the self-made **entrepreneur**. More than that, however, Walker used her fortune, influence and position to better the lives of others and provide economic and social opportunity to others born into humble circumstance.

Before she was Madam Walker (and it was “Madam” – no “e”), she was Sarah Breedlove, born in Louisiana in 1867, the daughter of former slaves. Her parents were **sharecroppers** on plantation land near the town of Delta. She was an orphan before her seventh birthday, and despite best efforts, she and her two older siblings were unable to continue working the land. Crop failure and an epidemic of yellow fever forced them to abandon farming altogether and seek work as domestics and laundresses, two of the very few occupations available to poor women, let alone young girls. Both, like farming, required exhausting physical labor. Her early teen years found her living in Vicksburg, MI, with her now married older sister, and working primarily as a laundress.

She married at 14, in part, it has been suggested, to escape an intolerable life in the home of her brother-in-law, whom she later referred to as “cruel and contemptuous.” Personal loss continued to haunt her, however, with the death of her husband shortly after the birth of their only child, a daughter.

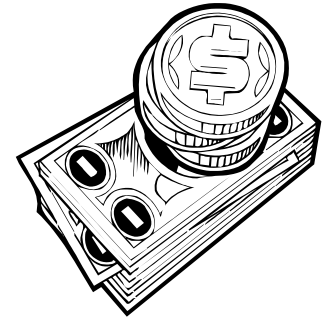
Widowed by the age of 20, and with a young daughter to raise, she moved once more, this time to St. Louis, and spent the next 15 years doing other people’s laundry and attending public night schools whenever possible. Through it all, she was able to set aside enough money to educate her daughter.

At some point before the turn of the century, Breedlove began to suffer from traumatic **alopecia**, hair loss caused by poor nutrition and harsh treatments intended to straighten hair. The condition was, and to a much lesser extent still is, a common cause of hair loss among African American women. She began to experiment with various mixtures to stimulate regrowth and more successfully straighten hair. She eventually came across a formula that, in conjunction with a newly developed type of steel comb, worked. She sold this, and other self-developed hair care products door-to-door to supplement her income. In 1905, ready to risk her future on her infant business, she moved to Denver and began selling her products by mail. It was in Denver that she married newspaperman Charles Joseph Walker and added “Madam” to her new name to lend it an air of dignity.

Dignity was important to Walker, both personally and professionally. The advertising that was developed to help sell her products stressed the importance of good hygiene and neat appearance. This was not mere salesmanship on her part. Walker knew too well the obstacles that confronted African American women attempting to earn a living and make their way in society. She was to remain keenly aware of these obstacles throughout her success and rise to prominence, and would address them by various means.

An important step in this direction was the opening of Lelia College in Pittsburgh, in 1908. Named for her daughter, who by then lived in that city, the college offered beauty courses for women who could then use their new skills to earn a living. For those who lived elsewhere, **correspondence courses** were available. Yet other women found employment as sales agents for Walker's products.

In 1910, Walker solidified her position as an important entrepreneur by moving her company to Indianapolis and opening a manufacturing facility. At the time the nation's largest inland industrial center, Indianapolis was the intersecting point of eight major railway systems and home to a vibrant and growing black community. All of these factors Walker recognized as significant. The railroads allowed for fast and effective shipment of product directly from the source to points all across the U.S. The local community provided not only a local customer base, but as importantly, a ready workforce.

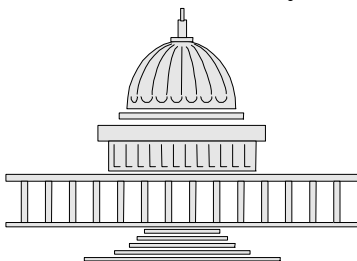


Walker not only was interested in developing and selling hair care and personal hygiene products, but also in teaching others how best to use them. She trained a national sales force that in turn trained a nation of "Beauty Culturists." In those mostly pre-unionization days of labor strife, she organized her own workers into The Madam C.J. Walker Hair Culturists Union of America. Local chapters of the union were encouraged to become active in their communities and engage in **philanthropic** and educational work. Moreover, they were rewarded by the company for doing so.

Walker saw her products, and their proper use, as an avenue for self-improvement and self-pride: A neat and successful appearance would lead an individual to feel better about him/herself as well as presenting a positive image and model to the world. Too, she was well aware that the economic opportunities provided by her company, whether as sales agents, Beauty Culturists, manufacturing workers, or beauty shop owners/operators, were important in the African American communities in which they were located.

Beyond this, however, Walker knew that she was a role model and seldom wasted a chance to present herself as such. She used her own life as an example for others, encouraging them to take control of their own lives and make their own opportunities. By the mid 1910s, she was one of the most successful businesswomen in the United States and perhaps the most well known.

There is some speculation as to just how wealthy Madam Walker was. She is often referred to as a millionaire, but she denied this during her own lifetime. Upon settlement of her estate after her death, her total wealth was found to be just over \$500,000, including household goods. Regardless of total amounts, she was by any measure wealthy for her day, and she used her financial resources to engage in a wide variety of philanthropic pursuits. In Indianapolis alone, she was instrumental in funding or establishing the Senate Avenue YMCA, which was located very near her manufacturing facility and offices, the Flanner House, and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, among other organizations. Nationally, she was an avid supporter of the NAACP, many black colleges and universities, and anti-**lynching** organizations. She put her money where her beliefs were.



She also put her name where her beliefs were. She instituted an anti-**discrimination** lawsuit against a local Indianapolis theater, traveled to Washington D.C. to protest **segregationist** policies in the War Department directly to President Woodrow Wilson, and, in 1918, attempted to travel to the post-war **Versailles Conference** as part of a delegation to petition for the rights of African Americans on that international stage.

She did not always have success. She, like the other members of the Versailles delegation, was denied a passport. Personally, too, she suffered setbacks. Her marriage to Charles Walker ended in divorce in 1912, seemingly victim to her very success and her personal ambition, which he did not share. Physical ailments began to trouble her as well. **Hypertension** and kidney problems plagued her, as did the general toll of years of hard physical labor followed by years of near constant travel for business and speaking engagements.



Leaving the day-to-day operations of her business to daughter Lelia (by then known as A'lelia) and her Indianapolis lawyer and friend Freeman Ransom (for whom the Indianapolis neighborhood 'Ransom Place' is named), Walker made one final move, this time to New York City. Thwarted in an attempt to purchase an estate on Long Island, she bought a four and one-half acre plot at exclusive Irvington-on-the-Hudson. She hired architect Vertner W. Tandy to design and build a \$350,000 mansion that would not only serve as her home and venue for hosting and entertaining a growing stream of admirers and friends, but also would create an image and example of what could be achieved through hard work and determination, even by a woman. Even by an African American woman. In this stately home she entertained poet Langston Hughes, activist and intellectual W.E.B. DuBois, opera star Enrico Caruso, and political leader and theorist Marcus Garvey among scores of Walker's own employees and graduates. The orphaned pre-teen laundress had traveled a long way.

And she was still traveling in April of 1919, when she became ill. This trip was back to one of her many former hometowns, St. Louis. Her kidneys failed her for the last time, a direct result of her battles with hypertension. She was quickly rushed back to New York by private train car, but she was by then beyond medical help.



During her lifetime, Madam Walker had dreamed and planned for a theater in Indianapolis that would serve as a cultural center for that city's African American community. In 1927, eight years after her death, that goal was finally achieved. The Walker Theater is still today an active and flourishing part of Indianapolis and continues to host theater and musical performances, cultural events and celebrations. Its unique design and rooftop sign are **icons** on the local skyline and cultural landscape.

Moreover, Walker herself continues to exert an influence. Her life still serves as an example and lesson of what can be achieved through hard work and determination. Her commitment to education, philanthropy and social action are still valid models for those who seek to better their world and their own lives.



V O C A B U L A R Y

Alopecia: hair loss; *traumatic* alopecia refers to hair loss caused by damaging chemical or physical hair treatments, often in tandem with poor diet.

Correspondence Course: a class or educational program offered by mail.

Discrimination: actions taken on the basis of prejudice against a person or group of people.

Entrepreneur: one who organizes and operates a business, usually the owner.

Hypertension: high blood pressure.

Icon: an image or symbol that represents an idea or series of ideas.

Lynching: to execute someone without a trial, often merely on suspicion or fabrication of a crime, esp. by hanging.

Philanthropy (philanthropic): charitable work or financial aid intended to promote the common good.

Segregation: to separate one group from another based on race or class.

Sharecropper: one who farms land owned by another person, often paying a portion of the harvested crop as rent.

Versailles Conference: 1919 peace conference held at the end of World War I.

T I M E L I N E

1863	The Emancipation Proclamation is passed.
1865	The U.S. Civil War ends.
1867	Sarah Breedlove is born.
1874	Breedlove's parents die.
1881	Breedlove marries Moses McWilliams.
1885	Daughter Lelia (later changed to A'lelia).
1887	McWilliams dies.
1905 (approx.)	Breedlove develops successful hair tonic.
1906	Breedlove marries C.J. Walker, taking his last name.
1911	Walker moves her company to Indianapolis, establishes production factory.
1912	Madam and C.J. Walker divorce.
1916	Walker moves to New York.
1919	Walker dies after collapsing during speaking tour.
1927	Walker Theater opens in Indianapolis.

BACKGROUND TEXT FOR STUDENTS

GRADES 3 - 5

MADAM WALKER: ENTREPRENEUR

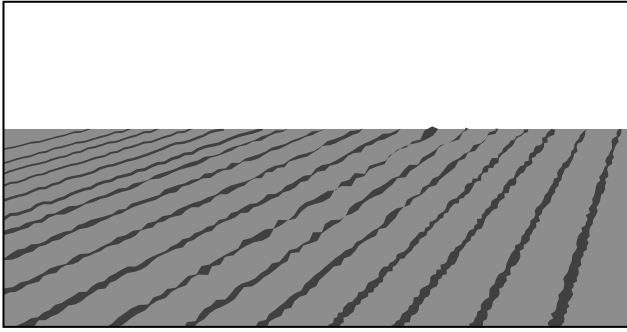


Madam C.J. Walker
(1867 – 1919)

Life was very different for women 100 years ago. Women were not allowed to vote. Very few women went to college, many did not even go to high school, and poor girls often did not get to go to school at all. Most women did not have jobs and those who did had only a very few types of work open to them: teaching school (if they were educated), cooking and cleaning other people's homes, working in factories, and selling merchandise in stores. Madam C.J. Walker was a very poor girl who did not go school, but still she managed to create her own product, open her own business, and become a famous and very successful businesswoman.

Madam Walker's name was Sarah Breedlove. She was born in 1867 in Louisiana on a large farm called a plantation. Her parents had both been slaves who were freed during the Civil War. No longer slaves, they continued to be farmers, which was the kind of work they knew best.

Sarah's life was a hard one. She was required to help in the fields and do chores around the house. Her older brothers and sisters had to work, too. There was no time or money for schooling, and even if there had been, schools for black children were few and far between. To make matters even worse, her parents died when she was 6 years old and the Breedlove children were forced to face life on their own.



Sarah and her siblings tried to keep the farm going, but the work proved too difficult and a long drought killed off most of their crops. In order to make money to survive, she and her sisters became laundresses, washing the clothing of other people for money. Laundry was very hard work, but it was more dependable than farming.

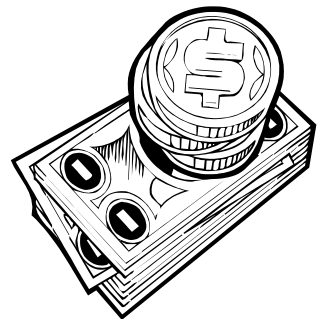
Sarah married at age 14, which was not uncommon in those days. Four years later she gave birth to a baby girl they named A'lelia. Tragedy soon struck again when her husband died, leaving Sarah a widow at 20 with a daughter to raise. She continued to work as a laundress and cook for the next several years, managing to save enough money to give her daughter the education she never had herself.

During this time, Sarah's hair began to thin and fall out. Noticing that this was a problem for other women, too, she began to experiment to find a way to stop the problem and help her hair to grow back in again. After much trial and error, she found a formula that worked and began to sell it to other women.

It took a lot of hard work and several years, but her business became more and more successful. In 1906 she married and became business partners with C.J. Walker, whose name she took, adding "Madam" at the beginning to make it sound more businesslike. Walker began to travel all over the United States showing people how to use her hair care products and setting up schools for others to learn to open their own businesses.

As Madam Walker's business became more successful, she worked harder for ideas that she believed in: women's rights, education for African Americans, and aid for poor people. She was generous with both her time and money and used herself as an example to others of how hard work and determination could lead to a better life.

Madam Walker is not just important because she became wealthy and famous, but because she used her wealth and fame to help other people improve their chances of finding success.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Grades 3-5

Subject: Madam C. J. Walker

Duration: One – Five Classes

Activity 1

Objectives

- ❑ Students will be able to identify Madam C.J. Walker; and
- ❑ Students will be able to list significant facts from her life.

Indiana's Academic Standards

Social Studies: 3.1.6, 3.5.4, 4.1.6, 5.5.6

English/ Language Arts: 3.6.1, 4.6.1, 5.2.3

Supplies:

Student Background text

“Who’s Who” worksheet

Instructions:

1. Have students read the student background text about Madam Walker. Use the following questions to generate discuss with your students:
 - ❑ Madam Walker was a hero and role model for many people. A role model is someone that you admire and want to be like.
 - ❑ Why do you think Madam Walker was admired?
2. As a group, each student should choose one role model, and pretend to be that person. The class should interview each person to figure out who they are. A time limit should be imposed. In order to make the process more successful, it may help to develop a set list of questions that each child must answer. For example,
 - ❑ What is your profession?
 - ❑ What special quality or ability do you have?
3. Have students complete the “Who’s Who” worksheet.

Activity 2

Objectives

- ❑ Students will be able to define entrepreneur and explain its importance; and
- ❑ Students will brainstorm an idea for a business; and
- ❑ Students will develop a resource that shows how to advertise a good or product that is to be manufactured

Indiana's Academic Standards

Social Studies: 3.4.3, 4.1.9, 4.4.1, 4.4.7, 5.4.5

English/ Language Arts:

Visual Art: 3.7.3, 4.7.3, 5.10.1

Supplies:

Paper

Pencils

Markers, crayons, or paint

Instructions:

1. Madam Walker was successful as a businesswoman. She created a product and sold it to millions of people. Explain to the students what an entrepreneur is. Have the students, in small groups of four to five students, develop their own idea for a business. Make sure that they understand that this is a *brainstorming* session. At this stage, any idea is possible. Many a business has been born from an impossible dream. Make some ground rules for brainstorming:
 - a. All ideas have merit at this time.
 - b. Do not call anyone names for he/she's idea.
 - c. After all ideas have been written down, go back and eliminate those that really wouldn't work (*Grandma is not going to bake all those pies for you*)
 - d. Narrow your list to four or five ideas. (*One per person per group*)
 - e. Discuss why each business would work or would not work (*You want to start a dog walking business but there are no dogs in your town-probably not a good business idea*).
 - f. Finally take a vote on the best idea based on good sound reasons for the business and use it for the next step.
2. Have the students make a flier for the business that includes:
 - Business name
 - Type of product or service being offered
 - Contact information (phone number to order, or store location, etc.)
 - Owners' names
 - Picture of product
4. After completing the flier, each group should share their creation with the rest of the class.
5. Older students can be challenged to make a product and sell it to family and friends. If they do, they should develop a strategy to market their business to their audience. The Junior Achievement program is available in many sites throughout Indiana. This program helps students learn about business and entrepreneurship in innovative and hands-on ways. Check out their website at: <http://www.ja.org>

Activity 3**Objectives**

- ❑ Students will make a list of women in history who have made significant contributions to our society; and
- ❑ Students will research, write and edit a newspaper article based on the accomplishments of women in our history

Indiana's Academic Standards

Social Studies: 3.1.6, 4.1.6, 4.1.7, 4.5.6, 5.5.2, 5.5.3

English/ Language Arts: 3.5.2, 3.6.1, 4.5.3, 4.6.1, 5.5.6

Supplies:

Paper and pencil

Art supplies

Instructions:

1. Have students research and generate a list of famous women throughout history – hundreds of years ago, a hundred years ago, fifty years ago, today, and fifty years in the future. For younger students you can use the short list that is on the resource page to help them to get going. Be sure that the students include Madam Walker. You could have students focus only on famous African American women. Have students write three significant things about each woman. For the woman of the future, have students write about activities, clothing styles, political views and jobs.
2. Tell students they can invite two women from the list to speak to their class. Have students write who they would invite and why.
3. Then have students write down the questions they would ask and what the women’s responses might be. Use these responses and questions to write a newspaper article that should be written as if the event covered in the article had just occurred. Students should include illustrations and or pictures to go with the articles. Have students write as a bonus question why Madam Walker should be included in this group of contributors to our society.

Evaluation

A point scale can evaluate a student’s work during lessons. Teachers also can custom-design an evaluation that could include observation, a numeric rating scale and/or class discussion.

Student Evaluation

Tell the students the word *evaluate* means to weigh, to judge, or to determine the value of something. The most important evaluator is the student himself or herself. Give each student a copy of the “I LEARNED...” Questions with each activity. Instruct them to turn their answers to the questions in with the assignment. Together as a class go over their questions and answers, discussing how the answers to these questions could help the students to judge the quality of their own work, and improve it.



Who's who?



Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Look at the following list of names. Circle at least three that you consider to be role models. Next to the name, write one thing you admire about each person whose name you circled.

J. K. Rowling _____

Michael Jordan _____

Reggie Miller _____

Peyton Manning _____

George W. Bush _____

Pink _____

Judy Blume _____

Jackie Chan _____

Jennifer Love Hewitt _____

Look over your list. Who do you admire? Do they all have anything in common?

Compare your list with the person sitting next to you. How does his/ her list compare to yours?

“I LEARNED...” QUESTIONS

Name _____ **Date** _____

1. What were you expected to do for this assignment?

2. In this assignment, what did you do well?

3. If you had to do this assignment over, what would you do differently?

4. What help do you need from me?

LESSON PLAN EVALUATION

Your feedback is important to us. We welcome your comments to help us plan lessons in the future. Please check your responses and return to the Indiana State Museum. You may return the evaluation by mail, fax, or e-mail to:

Attention: Teacher and Student Program Coordinator, ssteinem@dnr.state.in.us

Fax 317.233.8268

1. Please indicate the lesson plan you received:

- ☐ James Whitcomb Riley
- ☐ Madam C. J. Walker
- ☐ Young Abraham Lincoln
- ☐ The Anti-Slavery Movement
- ☐ Modes of Transportation
- ☐ Quilts
- ☐ Civil War Booklet
- ☐ Amish of Indiana
- ☐ Oliver P. Morton
- ☐ Fossils
- ☐ Ice Age Animals

2. Did you find the lesson plan easy to understand and use?

Yes ____ No ____ Not sure ____

If "no," what was the problem? _____

3. Were the connections to the state standards appropriate?

Yes ____ No ____ Not sure ____

Comments: _____

4. Was the length of this lesson plan

too short? ____ too long? ____ just right? ____

Comments: _____

5. Was the lesson plan appropriate for the grade/ability level of your students?

Yes ____ No ____ Not sure ____

Comments: _____

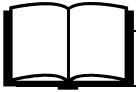
6. What activity did your students like the best? _____

7. What activity did your student like the least? _____

Why? _____

How could we improve it? _____

Additional comments: _____



RESOURCES

Books

Baker, Ronald L., *Homeless, Friendless, and Penniless: The WPA Interviews with Former Slaves Living in Indiana*.

Bundles, A'lelia, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*.

Phillips, Clifton, *Indiana in Transition: 1880 – 1920*.

Web sites

The World Wide Web is chock-full of information on Madam C.J. Walker. A keyword search will yield literally hundreds of potential sites. Most of these sites offer very similar, very standard biographies of Walker and are thus indistinguishable from one another. The following are sites that offer more depth of information and/or more unique perspectives.

www.madamcjwalker.com

www.womenshistory.about.com Enter keywords 'Madam Walker.'

www.indianahistory.org Enter keywords 'Madam Walker.'

www.nbbta.com web site of National Black Business Trade Association offers a glimpse of contemporary black entrepreneurs.

www.africana.com/Articles/tt_006.htm leads to an article discussing the general history of black entrepreneurs in the United States.

Famous Women – There are many more women than this short list who have made contributions to American history:

Abigail Adams 1744-1818 – Wife of John Adams, mother of John Quincy Adams
- Supporter of women's rights

Sacagawea 1787 - 1812 - Interpreter for Lewis and Clark expedition

Sojourner Truth 1797- 1883 - First African American woman to speak out against slavery

Carrie Chapman Catt 1859 – 1947 - Founded National League of Women Voters

Helen Keller 1880 – 1968 - Fought for the rights of the blind and deaf/blind

Dorothea Lange 1895 – 1965 - Photographer famous for her pictures of migratory farm workers

Shirley Chisholm 1924- First African American woman to serve in the House of Representatives

Gloria Steinem 1934 - Writer and leading supporters of women's liberation movement in the U.S.

Hillary Rodham Clinton 1947 - First Lady appointed to health reform and is now a New York Senator